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Soviet Reaction to North Korean Defense Zone

North Korea's declaration of a 50-mile military sea boundary last month appears to have added another strain to the already cool USSR - North Korean relationship. The deputy chief of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Treaty and Legal Department, I. I. Yakovlev, has told US Embassy officers that Moscow will take a "firm" stand against the substance of the North Korean declaration at next year's Law of the Sea Conference.

Another Foreign Ministry official, in an earlier conversation, asserted that North Korea did not consult the Soviets before issuing the proclamation. Yakovlev noted, however, that Pyongyang is well aware of the Soviet attitude since he and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers I. T. Novikov had traveled to North Korea in January 1975 to argue against the establishment of both a military sea boundary and a "fisheries zone."

Yakovlev said that the Soviets would make a formal statement to the North Korean Government on the issue after they obtained "clarification" about the area encompassed by the zone and stressed that "the Soviet Union will not be mild" in its opposition to the North Korean declaration. He voiced Soviet concern that the North Korean declaration could cause serious problems to nations which deploy large navies, including the USSR and the US, particularly if other smaller countries begin to proclaim military sea boundaries. Yakovlev also noted that the issue could be exploited by those countries, particularly China and Romania, which regularly attack the great power naval presence abroad.

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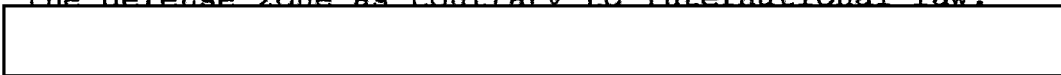
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The US Embassy comments that the Soviets may have chosen the law of the sea forum as the best vehicle for mounting multilateral opposition to the "substance" of the North Korean declaration, rather than joining the US and others in publicly opposing Pyongyang's initiative at this time. The sole public reaction to the issue in the Soviet press has been to carry, without comment, a Japanese news agency report quoting the Japanese chief cabinet secretary's strong statement opposing the defense zone as contrary to international law.

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